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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a survey of the available research on the counseling of women. It incorporates the findings of a sample of women's indications about their needs, goals, attitudes, and where they received or failed to receive counseling in the educational-vocational decision-making process. The writers found that the empirical research tends to deal with feminine stereotypes rather than with changing realities. The authors believe that further work is needed in understanding the use of the Strong Vocational Interest Blank for Women for Counseling, in light of changing life styles for women. The authors also noted that certain writers are working with new trends in feminine life styles which are bringing about changes in women's educational and vocational development. They hope that these will lead to changes in the counseling that women receive, making it more commensurate with their needs. (Author/WS)

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Counseling Mature Women from Differing Cultures

APGA

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(Based in part on research conducted with Susan Butler)

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Introduction

The following paper presents a survey of the available research on the counseling of women, incorporated with what a specific sample of women (in the Continuing Education Program at Wellesley College) has indicated about themselves and their needs, goals, attitudes--and where they received or failed to receive counseling in the educational-vocational decision-making process.

The writers have found that the empirical research tends to deal with feminine stereotypes, rather than changing realities. Many studies have used the Strong Vocational Interest Blank for Women to identify specific interest and occupational patterns. We believe that further work is needed in understanding the use of this instrument for counseling, in light of changing life styles for women which do not fit a traditional homemaker or career pattern.

We have also noted, however, that certain writers are working with the new trends in feminine life styles, which are bringing about changes in women's educational and vocational development, and which will (we hope) change the counseling that women receive, making it more commensurate with their needs.

Studies Related to the Counseling of Women in Continuing Education

The writers' initial intention was to conduct a survey and evaluation of the research in counseling for women who return to an educational setting, namely centers of continuing education such as Wellesley, Michigan, Minnesota, and Sarah Lawrence. We were hoping to find information on the expectations of these women who are preparing for an alternative life style--their needs, attitudes, and interests--and specifically what counseling could mean to them vis a vis the decision-making process.

Basically, we discovered that there has been very little research in this area, little of it empirical, although feedback from the University of Wisconsin, Northeastern University, and a majority of 45 colleges and universities polled by letter would indicate a desire for and an awareness of the need for research. There are, however, a few articles relevant to the counseling of women returning to the educational setting.

Esther Matthews (1969) designed a cogent theoretical pattern of vocational decision-making for adult women which would be of value in the counseling situation. She stresses that these women who seek new vocational outlets in middle life are like their male counterparts who are also "reassessing the meaning and direction of their lives and seek new and different occupations" and that "counselors need to utilize the joint resources of thoughtful men and women involved in the resynthesis of identity in mid-life (115)." However, she feels this pattern is limited, as it can only be reflected by suburban women, who can enjoy a leisurely counseling process to a greater degree than their urban (ghetto) sisters.

The stated "Eight Phases" are based on Erikson's life stages, Super's

self-concept and career development, and Tiedeman's process of decision-making in career development. Phase I is the period of 'soul-searching,' analogous to Erikson's stage of "Trust versus Mistrust" in which the woman can conclude that she is ready to take the risk of reordering her family's life pattern. Phase II includes working through the misunderstandings and conflicts which stem from the family's lack of involvement in the decision-making process, especially the guilt which may arise when they are no longer first on the woman's list of priorities. Matthews suggests here the possibility of group counseling for the woman and her family. Phase III includes experimentation with new roles, and Phase IV planning for reentry into an occupation or entry into a new area. In Phase V, "Vocational Implementation," she discusses dealing with the anxieties arising from the woman having acted on her decision, such as returning to the classroom. The last three phases are concerned with analysis, resynthesis, and having the woman become a vocational developmental resource for women in the earlier stages of counseling.

Letchworth (1970), using an identity-integrity approach, cites the return to college as a positive means of resolving the "integrity crisis," which is not exclusive of the identity crisis, but deals with fundamental existential questions and, "if resolved, will lead the woman to more individualized relations with herself, her family, and society (103)." He believes such a crisis derives from factors such as:

1. Relief from boredom--time on her hands, a dull life in comparison with her husband, lack of fulfillment through the usual community sources.

2. Desire for an interesting job or to make an active contribution to the family.

3. Escape from other responsibilities.

4. Divorce or other marital difficulties.

He also considers the kinds of adjustment difficulties that women who seek to resolve their integrity crisis through a return to the educational setting will face: 1) the scheduling of academic and household responsibilities; 2) management of guilt feelings and the need for spouse support and acceptance; 3) shame at not being able to live up to one's standards or aspirations.

There are two other articles which deal with adjustment problems in returning to the classroom. Porter (1970) deals with the specific counseling needs of adults, namely the lack of self-confidence, the press of time, the pressures of family life, and the need for perhaps greater formality, less directiveness, and more flexibility as regards the institutional structure. Myers (1964) also stresses the need for flexibility in planning the educational course of the mature woman, including scheduling changes, waiver of certain requirements, and the standardization of information. These are certainly areas in which the counselor can be influential.

Finally, Hiltunen (1968) has suggested that what is needed are counseling

courses for adult women--"orientation and exploration" seminars--with optional individual counseling.

The scarcity of available research in this area would appear to reflect a lag between popular interest (sparked by the liberation movement and the subsequent influx of literature devoted to women) and professional activity. However, a survey of the research does not indicate that women counselors have lacked awareness of the changing woman, her greater personal freedom, and the possibility for varied choices (including returning to school) in her life. Some men counselors may not have considered the problems.

Neuman (1963) questioned how a woman's education can be planned to the best advantage in light of the fact that "pressures resulting from biological needs, the urge for freedom, and the mobility and prosperity of our society remove the girl from school often when she is 19 or 20," when "she isn't the conventional 'drop-out' and needs to be provided with the chance (and the encouragement) to continue as her own schedule permits (381)."

Matthews (1963) stated that the "intelligent woman of the middle thirties has a highly developed sense of values, a wealth of life experiences, a much better idea of where she would like to fit into the world of work, and a capacity for greater commitment to professional life since the marriage-family goal has been accomplished (275)." [Compare this with Margaret Elizabeth.]

Pietrofesa in 1967 concluded that the "educative process of females should be continuous, extending well into adulthood. Because the woman's life pattern differs from that of the man's, at least for the next few decades, all women must be educated to play the dual role of homemaker and earner (53)."

Yet, in spite of this awareness of change and choice in feminine life styles and an indicated need for new trends in the counseling of women, a concomitant body of research (particularly in the area of continuing education) has not developed. In the following section is information from a survey of women in continuing education on the type of counseling they need and the type of counseling they did or did not receive as girls and young women. Their testimony indicates how great the need is for more research into the counseling of girls and women for change and choice (including educational development), if these are to be the continuing bases for the patterning of feminine life styles.

Analysis of Counseling Needs of Women Enrolled in Continuing Education, Wellesley College, 1970-71

We are interested in finding out about the motivation and counseling needs of women returning to formal higher education, and to this end we surveyed all students enrolled in 1970-71 in the Continuing Education Program at Wellesley College. This program is designed for women of all ages who wish to complete requirements for the B.A. degree or who wish to enroll in courses in fields different from former ones in order to change vocations. What brought them back, we wondered, and how were their interests different now from what they had been after high school graduation, and why? We wondered, too, whether more counseling or advice along the way would have made a difference in life pattern.

To this end we designed a questionnaire intended to differentiate between motivation and interests then (immediately following high school graduation) and now (when they are enrolled at Wellesley), and to find out if counseling was or could have been different. We found, not to our surprise, that there had been little or no vocational or educational counseling for these women, and we were led to the next question which must be hypothetical: would increased counseling and interest in these women and their careers have made a difference in their educational/vocational developmental patterns? A difference, we mean, for the better...

The questionnaire was sent to all 35 students enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 1970-71 in the Wellesley Continuing Education Program. Twenty-five responses (71%) were tabulated.

The age of the respondents is between 22 and 57; the median age is 38. Twenty-three were married, one is single and one divorced. Children's ages range between 2 and 27, and grandchildren's ages between six months and five years. The students graduated from high school between 5 and 33 years ago. The major fields of degree candidates range widely. The largest number is in English (7); there are three psychology majors and two majors each in art history and political science. Biology, botany, anthropology, history, sociology, Spanish, music and pre-med were listed by one person each. The non-degree candidates list psychology (two), art history (two), and one each in biology and pre-med.

In writing the questionnaire we attempted to get at the motivation of the women who had returned to undergraduate work, often 20 years after leaving high school. We have not yet any evidence of who succeeds and who fails, since the median grade of the first semester students during this first year of the program was A-. We wanted to be neutral, to find out why women make the educational and vocational choices they do, and what factors influence them. By the nature of questions with check-off answers we have biased the answers somewhat, but we purposely left space for write-in comments so that respondents could express their own biases.

Within the five alternatives chosen as factors seeming important in a decision to return to college now, most of the students (22) indicated the need to complete work for a degree. Twelve mentioned the need for specific expertise in an area, and eight listed the fact that children need less attention now. Related to the latter is the indication from seven people that they had had enough of home and volunteer activities. Five mentioned the need for course work for a change of fields, and three indicated that husbands wished them to complete the degree. (Totals are greater than 25 because we allowed overlapping replies, asking that all applicable answers be checked.)

We next asked about family attitudes toward returning to school, both before application and at the present time when the students are enrolled. Before application, 20 families were listed as supportive; now 22 are thus indicated. Five were neutral before, and only three are now. None were opposed.

Twelve people said their attitude and motivation were different now from the time immediately after secondary school graduation, and five said they were not.

We asked specific questions about these differences over time, and the answers were dramatically different when comparing the present with the past. In characterizing motivation then, the largest number (12) said they needed to prove themselves, and the same number said that interest in the intellectual content of courses was important. Attitude and motivation now were indicated by 23 respondents as characterized by interest in intellectual content of courses, and by 19 by a wish to fulfill their own ambitions. This latter compares with only 10 people who had indicated the wish to fulfill their own ambitions as formerly important. Another difference was the number of people now who say they wish to range broadly among disciplines (11) and within a discipline (14) as opposed to eight and seven for these choices formerly. In other words, our mature women act like mature women, thinking more for themselves and about their own interests and needs. Family considerations are far less now (only one person indicates a need to fulfill family ambitions now, but seven did formerly), and there is a clear statement of self-motivation.

In another then-and-now comparison, we asked what factors were the greatest motivators after return to college compared to the important factors immediately following secondary school. The most frequent response now is the need for knowledge of course content (20 responses). Only 10 responded to this question as it applied then, and the most frequent response to earlier motivation was the need for good grades, with 12 responses. Now only seven indicate this. It is interesting that 10 said that earlier they needed to compete with classmates, but none list this now. Again, not to our surprise, these women are mature and more self-directed compared to their earlier styles. A parenthetical question occurs to us here: are today's young women more mature and self-aware and tuned in to vocational opportunities than were those women in our sample, many years out of secondary school? We don't know but feel the question bears investigating.

Very few of the women indicated that they received any kind of counseling in their younger days. Eighteen said they received none, and seven said some. As sources of this advice, when it was present, teachers were the most frequently mentioned, by seven respondents. As many people mentioned parents as sources of advice (five) as mentioned school counselors (five). There was a scattering of listings of other people who offered counsel--none of them professionals.

When we asked in relation to the question above the source of the most useful advice, we were amazed to find an almost entirely negative reaction. From the youngest student surveyed to the oldest, the reactions ranged around comments like: "None was helpful." "I was advised to go into a career with dwindling career opportunities." "I wish I had some." "I got no guidance whatsoever." "My own advice was the best."

What would they, then, advise a teen-age daughter now about her higher education? To this question almost everyone responded, although advice was sometimes conflicting. For example, one woman said "College is not essential. Take some time between high school and college, if any." Another strongly emphasized (all emphases are in the originals) "Don't fail to go to college!" Generally, though, these women feel that students should have the opportunities to explore their own educational interests and to pursue them.

When we next asked how this advice differed from advice given them we found, in addition to those who again said they had been given none, many who felt they had never had options pointed out to them, nor were they encouraged in more than a limited way. Most had never been urged to think about the substance of education, and few had even been encouraged to think about it in terms of a job, much less a career.

When we asked a similar pair of questions, concerning hypothetical vocational, as opposed to educational, advice to a teen-age daughter now compared with advice they had received, we also found some revealing differences between then and now, and we again found some conflicting replies. For example, the woman who said a girl should qualify for a job she could do all her life contradicted to some extent the feelings of the one who said a young girl should not be irrevocably committed to her first idea. Generally the advice was to be aware of all the possibilities, to explore, to study broadly before settling on a career, to take your time and develop your own interests. All these suggestions, variously worded, were in contrast to the vocational counseling, such as it was, that was given to the respondents when they had been graduating from high school. They had been told very specifically (when they had been told at all) to find a lucrative profession, to earn a living by whatever means, that the main criterion in a job was money. These responses came from students of all ages, not just those who had graduated from high school in times of relative economic decline.

In summary, we have to say that the 25 women responding felt uncounseled at best, and badly advised at worst. Here are 25 people of some demonstrable ability who have been left to their own devices in a world which admittedly has underused talents of women. What do we know about the research into counseling of women, who traditionally have had to juggle two kinds of roles to meet family responsibilities as well as their educational/vocational needs? We find, as will be seen in Section III, that the research thus far tends to identify and create for the counselor a difference between career-and home-oriented women. Shall the twain never meet?

Trends and Possible Alternatives

Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, Director of the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, begins an article on counseling women for responsibilities by exploding many of our cherished myths about women. She starts out with "a woman's place..." and goes on to the notion of passivity--that women have a natural preference for service occupations, that children of working mothers will grow up disturbed and neurotic. And so on. At last the myths are being demolished in high places.

Elizabeth Drews' article of 1965 speaks to these myths, although not specifically by name, when she indicates that many of the qualities attributed specifically to women are in fact attributable to both sexes in highly creative individuals. When the "feminine" traits are combined with the "masculine" the result is apt to be, says Drews quoting MacKinnon (1962) "the most outstanding artistic and intellectual contributions." The implications of this ought to give us all pause as counselors and people.

Zytowski (1969) while purveying the standard brand of research on differences in the work life of men and women, makes a forward-looking final statement after having described women's work preferences and the factors contained therein. He indicates that "the hope of altered social expectations and technological innovation will ultimately result in the obsolescence of this entire scheme [meaning the usual career patterns of women as they have until now]."

Finally Linda Bruemmer in 1969 sees some new trends and suggests possibilities that will make life vastly different for women and therefore for those who counsel them. More young men and women, Bruemmer points out, are accepting the pattern of working wife because their mothers worked. And she goes on to say that the nature of leadership is changing from the fearless leader to the cooperative facilitator. Both these trends would seem to indicate that women and work will be more compatible.

Given these trends, what possibilities will be open for women in the future? First, they may well more frequently have a full-time career. Second, continuing education may become the more usual pattern, with later education that trains women for work. Bruemmer indicates, as other authors have, a trend for more women to remain single, which situation automatically releases them from the career/home conflict. An additional possibility, not suggested in the works studied, is the shared career with both men and women working what now is considered to be part time; a redefinition of the full-time work requirement would bring about this change.

The research on the practical realities of counseling women is, despite its length, slim in answers to the questions posed by many authors. What may release women from much of the conflict are the trends--social, economic, educational, marital--mentioned above. Changes in the life styles of women will probably only come about when men are willing to permit their own and their wives' and daughters' styles to change, an occurrence that is now occasionally visible. With these possibilities in mind, counselors will have more scope in suggesting alternative career patterns to women of all ages.

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Questionnaire for Continuing Education Students

Wellesley College

March 1971

1. Age _____

2. Marital Status S_____ M_____ W_____ D_____

3. Ages of children _____

4. Ages of grandchildren _____

5. How many years ago did you graduate from high school? _____

6. Probable major field _____

7. If not degree candidate, major academic field of interest _____

8. What factors seem important in your decision to return to college at this time? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Desire to complete work for a degree

_____ Need for course work to change fields

_____ Children need less attention now

_____ Husband's desire that I complete degree

_____ Satiation with home and volunteer activities

_____ Need for explicit professional expertise
Specify:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

9. What was the attitude of your family (husband, children, parents) to your returning to college before you applied?

Supportive _____

Neutral _____

Opposed _____

Comments _____

_____

10. What is your family's present attitude?

Supportive _____

Neutral _____

Opposed _____

11. Do you find differences between your present attitude and motivation toward college work and your attitude and motivation immediately after secondary school graduation? _____

How would you characterize your attitudes and motivation then and now? (Check all that apply.)

Then	Now	
_____	_____	Need to prove myself
_____	_____	Interest in intellectual content of courses
_____	_____	Desire to range broadly among disciplines
_____	_____	Desire to range broadly within a discipline
_____	_____	Wish to fulfill family ambitions
_____	_____	Wish to fulfill my own ambitions
_____	_____	Others (specify) _____
		_____
		_____

12. What factors have been the greatest motivators to you since you returned to college? What factors were the greatest motivators in the years immediately following secondary school?

Then	Now	
_____	_____	Need for good grades
_____	_____	Need for knowledge of course content
_____	_____	Need to compete with classmates
_____	_____	Need to live up to family expectations
_____	_____	Need for the degree

13. Did you receive advice and counsel pertaining to your education and career as you were growing up? _____

What were the sources of this advice?

_____ Parents

_____ Friends

_____ Parents' friends

_____ Teachers

_____ School counselors

_____ Religious advisers

_____ Other (specify) _____

Briefly state which advice was most helpful to you, and why._____

_____

_____

14. If you had a teen-age daughter, what advice would you give her about her higher education? _____

_____

_____

How is this different from advice given you when you were her age?

_____

_____

_____

15. What advice would you give her about her vocation? _____

_____

_____

How is this different from advice given you when you were her age?

_____

_____

_____

16. What is your vocational goal?

Within the next five years? _____

_____

Within the next ten years _____

_____

What would you hope to be your vocational activity immediately preceding retirement?

_____

_____

_____

17. We are interested in your ideas on the ideal academic environment. Do you prefer:

_____ Small classes (fewer than 20)	_____ Larger classes
_____ Few class meetings per week (2 or less)	_____ More frequent class meetings
_____ Letter grades	_____ A Pass/Non-Pass system
_____ Papers as criteria for evaluation	_____ Examinations
_____ Co-educational classes	_____ Only women in classes
_____ More women teachers	_____ More men teachers
_____ Variety of ages of students	_____ Classes with mature women only

Comments: _____

_____

_____

18. Please list any changes you would like in the Wellesley Continuing Education Program. Include suggestions for courses you would like offered, advisory and other auxiliary services you have wanted, and any other ideas.

_____

_____

_____

_____

We appreciate your help to the Continuing Education Program and thank you for completing this questionnaire.